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POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN BURKINA FASO: CONTRIBUTION OF THE PEASANT SOCIETY

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METHODOLOGY

This paper is being presented to the International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa. Its purpose is to analyze the experience acquired in Burkina Faso, the existing participation machinery and the role that women can play in it. To carry out the study, the writer traveled to the provinces to meet with officials of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) now increasingly known as voluntary development organizations (VDOs), and to meet women at their work places. Further documentation was received in the form of NGO annual report and general information documents.

1. Interviews

In order to secure a better appreciation of the scope of popular participation in Burkina Faso, officials of VDOs conducting women's activities were interviewed. Cases in point were the Association of Widows and Orphans of Burkina Faso, Sahel-Canada Solidarity, ATD 1/4 monde, the Pan-African Institute in West Africa (IPD/AOS), the Centre d'études sociales et economiques de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CESAO) and women working with such groups as the women's craft project, the "Naam" group and the kaya forest growers.

2. Mission travel

The author travelled to visit women's associations in the provinces of Houe (Bobo Dioulasso), Ratenga (Ouahigouya) and Sanemintenga (Kaya).

INTRODUCTION

Burkina Faso is a land-locked country classified among the poorest on the planet (with a per capita income of less than $US 200). Most of the problems (rural poverty, food deficit, external indebtedness, population pressure, rural-urban drift, ecological imbalance and political instability) undermining the growth and development of African countries affect Burkina Faso. Per capita consumption of food items is diminishing, worsening the undernourishment and malnutrition of substantial segments of the population, particularly women and children. To cope with this situation, increasing amounts of food have to be imported and this is weighing more and more on the balance of payments.

Such adverse circumstances can be attributed to a whole range of factors such as an agricultural pricing policy which favours urban consumers rather than the mainly rural producers; a structural decline of yields because of over-exploitation of the soil and insufficient rainfall which has been the cause of major migratory movements to the coastal countries, Côte d'Ivoire in particular.

Like other African countries, Burkina Faso would never have experienced so much external solicitude to analyze and examine all these constraints and to propose appropriate solutions. Many experts advocated in the 1970s two development concepts: the accordance of priority to the social dimension of economic development or the basic need approach which took cultural values into account in addressing basic needs, and the upgrading of agricultural pricing within an environment where market forces were allowed free play without State intervention.

Both ideas run into serious difficulties during their implementation. The capacity of African countries to promote development continues to weaken because the development patterns proposed had been implemented in ways which marginalize the rural world in terms of its assumption of responsibility and participation in decision making. One of the main reasons for many failures of development activity arise from this fact and the consequence is increasing poverty. The various concepts

will have to be reviewed in order to gain a better insight into development. The field activities and experience of international organizations, VDOs and economic intelligence centres call for a new approach to the issue. Accordingly, in 1986, the United Nations organized a special session devoted to the critical economic situation in Africa. In the action reforms of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (1986-1990), stress was laid on popular participation. At its forty-third regular session in 1988, the United Nations General Assembly conducted a mid-term review of the implementation of the UN-PAAERD and advocated that greater account should be taken of popular participation in development programmes.

Definition of the concept

Participatory development is a process of creative evolution directed by organized people who are aware of who they are. The people have to date been kept at a distance from any possiblity of working out and participating in their social development.

Participation is the key element in the perception of human development as the process whereby individual creativity can be unleashed. As everywhere else in West Africa, Burkina Faso has had many experiences in participatory development. Through those experiments, concepts have been developed for use as a frame of reference. IPD/AOS and CESAO are thinking out ways of participatory development that will enable communities to assume greater control in planning and deciding the way they want to progress. Such an approach elicits local initiative as the best means of participation in development.

In 1988 one IPD document referred to the need for drawing a distinction between spontaneous participation as practised in traditional community life and participation which specifically brings in foreign expertise into the life of communities and which would be an endeavour to mobilize and empower the peasantry.

From the exercise, it was found that the primary concerns undeniably occurred at three levels: educating or creating awareness; decision-making or autonomy; and achievement of results.

Participation can also be defined as a development process in which the initiative comes back to the people coming together as a group to conduct surveys and activities which enable them to improve their situation. Such initiatives are at times taken spontaneously by the people. More often, they are stimulated and supported by others. It would now be appropriate to see how this occurs in Burkina Faso.

I. THE DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITY LIFE IN BURKINA FASO

During the pre-colonial period, the peasants of Burkina Faso like many other African peasants, lived in communities. Traditionally, solidarity was the basis of village life. What this meant is that all activities were based on mutual assistance. Such mutual assistance created and consolidated social relations. The colonial economic policy introduced new forms of organization aimed at better exploitation of resources. The post-colonial era was characterized by rapid deterioration of the living conditions of rural people resulting in development actions being embarked upon. These actions which did not always conform to the traditional structures, led to the establishment of new organizations which were called: village groups, pre-co-operative groups, village associations and other forms of co-operatives. Despite the institution of traditional structures and modern forms of organization, many unknowns remain with regard to the socio-demographic aspect of the human factor.

1. Socio-demographic aspects of the human factor in the process of participatory development

As the decisive factor in any development approach, the human factor acquires particular importance because of the severity of the physical environment in Burkina Faso. Yet, it is in this physical environment that the socio-economic development of the country is being articulated. Throughout the history of the country, its men and women have proved themselves equal to the difficult conditions imposed by nature. Observation of their daily lives reveals various forms of originality reflected in the techniques which enable them to confront the rigours or advantages of the natural environment. Today, integrated in the same political system, inherited from the unrelenting efforts of the colonial system to reorganize them under one common administration, these people live under the influence of two factors which are the root and bedrock of participatory development, namely population pressure which is difficult to assess and dependence on the agrarian civilizations of old.

It seems impossible to give any precise figures on the population and its distribution for three vital reasons: the unorganized nature of civil registration, the lack of social parameters for conducting population counts and the unwillingness of the people to be registered and numbered. Most often some urban centers have facilities for undertaking systematic birth and death registration. Elsewhere, the establishment of new primary health posts (PSP) should make for the improvement of deficiencies in the existing system, opening it up extensively to the control of government officials who would work closely with the people. These examples show the inadequacy of population data, which need to be judiciously analyzed, particularly when dealing with the main aspects of distribution and diversities. A careful comparison of the official figures reveals some interesting facts. It shows that the rural population are numerically much more than town dwellers. In 1985, the population was estimated at 8 million including 7 million residents, representing an average density of 29 inhabitants per km². The spatial distribution of this population indicates, on the other hand, that the rural population account for 80 per cent of the total as against 20 per cent for town dwellers. Leaving aside the town dwellers, it seems that population distribution is not dependent only on natural conditions related to the soil and the climate. One thing is obvious and it is that the peasant societies in Burkina Faso have neither the same concepts of relationship between man and the land nor the same social organization nor behaviour vis-à-vis the monetary economy, religion and the new post-colonial political structures. As such, it seems difficult to pick out the determinant factors in popular participation. The natural homogeneity does not translate into social homogeneity. However, some common features exist, including dependence on the old agrarian civilizations. Such homogeneity does not, however, mean uniformity of socio-cultural affinity among the major ethnic groups, namely the Mossi, Bobo, Djoula, Samo, Lobi, Grunshie, Grumanche and Fulani. These diversities are at the origin of the various rural development approaches spanning a wide range of widely diversified civilizations. If the people of Burkina Faso produce grain by necessity, they are also animal herders by vocation. Over and above the agro-pastoral distinction, there is a convergence of civilizations which derive from the use of similar production techniques and in the way the environment and human resources are managed. However the distinctions weigh heavily on contemporary development both at the socio-cultural and socio-political levels, a phenomenon exemplified by the Moaga and Lobi societies. The former inherited very hierarchical and highly compartmentalized social organization for ensuring the durability of the political structure, from its initial orientation while the latter has manifested throughout its history a fidelity to its acephalous political organization, coupled with the unflinching will for independence and social equality. From organizational system, the Lobi society has developed a climate of social equality and a rejection of

constraining hierarchy. Contacts with highly expansionsit societies has politically weakened the Lobi society.

The other common feature which emerges from the mosaic of behaviour is the availability of the labour force, namely group participation as shown in the establishment of the Régie de chemin de fer Abidjan–Niger (RAN) (the Abidjan–Niger Railway Authority), in the war effort and in the active participation in the plantation economy of Côte d'Ivoire during the colonial period. The mental attitude of people towards community life is a major asset in participatory development. It is a vital aspect in economic growth but has one limitation in so far as the development of popular participation cannot be reduced to the single dimension of the readiness of the people. Popular participation also calls for the integration of tradtional forms of organization in modern forms of organization.

2. Traditional association and modern association

In the absence of a detailed inventory of tradtional associations within each society, it is worth noting those associations whose impact on work on the land has guaranteed success. Examples of these are in the Moaga society, particularly in the Yatenga region, where the persistent authority of the family cells has promoted the emergence of security groups against calamities and scourges, including the "Naam" groups which constitute production units. Elsewhere, the **song–taaba**, the **so–soaga** and the **ko–taaba** groupings are dynamic sources of mutual assistance and incentive to work. The **song–taaba** is a mutual assistance association; the **so–soaga** is an association which provides assistance to anyone soliciting such assistance and the **ko–taaba** organizes mutual assistance for farm work involving from two to a maximum of four production units.

This type of mutual assistance calls upon all the active population of the production units concerned and those who require such assistance cater for the participants. Generally, the associations are renewed annually and in thelong run helps to consolidate social links among the various members. The willingness of younger members to submit to the authority of the family head remains the basis of social chesion. In such societies, the compound is the basic unit. A compound may be defined as a dwelling unit which houses members of the same family and comprises one or several households. Generally, the household is constituted by one married man with his spouse or spouses, their children, family members and other still distant relatives.

The members of a compound or a household who work together constitute an economic unit, in other words, a production and consumption unit. The general population census in 1975 gave the number of compounds as 503,603 and the number of households as 972,971. The size of compounds increases with the age of the head, who in 96 per cent of cases is a man. Thus, while the average size of a compound is 6.8 persons for those headed by a person aged 15 to 19 years, the figure for compounds headed by people aged 60 and over is 22.9. The average number of people per compound and per household is 11.5 and 6.2 respectively. These global figures include very wide regional disparities. Polygamy is widespread and the social status of a head farmer increases with the number of people under his authority. Controlling the mobility of women, the source of production and reproduction of the labour force, confers a certain amount of power on the elders. Agricultural activities require abundant manpower due to the low level of technology in this area. The Burkina Faso society is still dominated by men just like most other agrarian societies.

In the transition from traditional forms of community life to modern forms of community life, the process of assimiliation of the former by the latter does not occur

judiciously. Problems of the co-existence of pre-colonial and post-colonial structures emerge and have to be dealt with expediently. Awareness of the imbalance in the traditional society and of its consequences has not led to the conception of new forms of associations, capable of overcoming the contradictions which have resulted from the evolution of traditional societies. Political statements on development are made up largely of wait-and-see tactics rather than positive initiatives in favour of rural folk. In the pre-colonial era as in the present day, the formation of associations seem to have been in reponse to prevailing problems. Although some political efforts have been made albeit incidental, they have not been stringent enough to overcome the structural difficulties in participatory development.

The peasant society has valuable production techniques, but it is devoid of ideological motivation and adequate political structure. This situation can be better illustrated through the study of initiatives taken by certain "target" groups such as rural youth and peasant women.

2 WOMEN'S INITIATIVE IN PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

The major development problems which afflict the people of Burkina Faso, namely food deficit, desertification, insufficient health facilities, illiteracy and high population growth can only be overcome through the participation of the majority of its people, i.e., women. Women whom some authors have referred to as the "other half of the sky" play a very important role in Burkina Faso. As rural exodus involves mostly economically active males, the imbalance in the sex-ratio in favour of women (51.7 per cent of the total population) is even more pronounced among the potentially active resident population who make up 52.1 per cent of the total population. Women are not only the majority in terms of numbers, but are more importantly the economic and social backbone of Burkina Faso society through their various socio-economic activities.

2.1 Activities of women's groups: mobilization and participation

Women of Burkina Faso are mobilized and organized either to defend the particularly vulnerable categories of the population through groups such as the Association of Widows and Orphans of Burkina Faso, and women's mutual assistance groups; to conduct community economic activities through women's community development associations adn handicrafts co-operatives for the women of Burkina Faso or to conduct training or literacy campaigns through the **rata-manégre** co-operatives and the associations of Zabre women.

The women are closely assocated with the various activities and are thereby able to improve their living conditions, although they are very often marginalized through certain discriminatory traditional considerations. The Association of Widows' and Orphans' of Burkina Faso is a Voluntary Development Organization (VDO) inaugurated on 20 January 1977 at the initiative of Mrs. D. Kabore. It has 545 widows and orphans and undertakes economic activities such as handicrafts, farming, credit facilities, small-scale trading and provides training for its members. The Ouagadougou social centre co-ordinates the activities in the other provincial centres of Bobo, Gaoua and Tougan. In 1989, about 60 women obtained personal credits of CFAF 25,000 for petty trading in fruits adn vegetables. In addition, a collective farm was built with the assistance of the Voluntary Development Organization, the Sahel-Canada Solidarity.

In the rural areas where 90 per cent of the women live, there are several women's viliage groupings. The "Naam" women's group has nearly 90,000 members at present, distributed in several rural areas of the country. Out of a total of 162,015

members, women account for 55 per cent. The mode of operation of this group is modelled on that of the **moaga** traditional associations characterized by democracy and equality. These groups were founded between 1966-67 by Mr. B.L. Ouedraogo (recently awarded the Hunger Project Prize for his efforts) who tried to reactivate this traditional structure by adapting it to current development needs.

The originality of these groups derive from the fact that they admit both male and female members and also from their democratic and participatory philosophy. The Swiss "Six S" VOD (se servir de la saison sèche en savane et au Sahel) (make use of the dry season in the savannah and in the Sahel) provides support to the "Naam" group. Economic activities engaged include the establishment of cereal banks, purchase of mills, cultivation of market gardening plots, domestic animal husbandry, preservation of produce by drying, soap making, production of textiles and objets d'art. These activities are carried out throughout the country and the people are increasingly interested in them as shown in the following table:

Year	No. of groups	Members	Men	Women
1966	3	150	72	78
1967	5	250	120	130
1968	14	700	336	364
1969	15	750	360	390
1976	124	6 200	2 976	3 224
1983	1 024	6 120	24 576	25 524
1984	1 500	7 500	36 000	39 000
1986	1 630	99 590	28 400	52 290
1987	2 453	151 910	70 290	84 475
1988	2 891	166 402	77 347	88 855
1989	2 768	161 013	71 708	89 301

Source: Data extracted from the following reports:

Ouedraogo, L.B., Rapport du sécrétariat exécutif au Conseil d'administration, 1985-1986.

Ouedraogo, M., Rapport de stage effectué à l'association 6 "S" du 2 mai au 31 octobre 1989 a Ouahigouya.

Ilboudo, S., Rapport de stage du 4 juillet au 4 septembre 1988 aux 6 "S" Ouahigouya.

However, not all the women's activities are adequately followed up. This has led to the failure of some projects including the women's handicrafts project in the Comoé province, which involved 100 women, and the project on the breeding of the **sourgoubila** choice breed of pigs. It seems that these failures have occurred because of the rush with which the projects had been implemented, without allowing for preliminary studies and sensitization of the people to the project, among other things.

Through interviews with these women, it became clearly obvious that they were strongly determined to collectively solve the problems confronting them. All the more so, as most of them had joined the association following difficulties encountered in the home, for instance, desertion of the family by the husband and inability to meet expenses on food, hospital fees, children's school fees, etc. As a result of the difficulties facing them, the women are obliged to safe guard their new-found life. Generally, the groups start locally and spontaneously and are then gradually integrated in the "Naam" Association.

2.2 The benefits of projects and OVDs to women

The Voluntary Development Organizations (VDOs) prefer to support organized groups, which take responsibility for their own development. As such, they do not operate within the same activity and project areas as village communities and governments, but assist village organizations to take initiative within the scope of the objectives defined by the Government in the National Plan. Most often, VDOs do not propose projects but provide assistance in project design and implementation, with the approval of the Government, in areas such as the construction of schools or clinics or the cultivation of market gardening plots. The aim of the VDOs is to raise the awareness of peasant organizations of their responsibility in the development process and assist them to assume this responsibility. This objective has limited their intervention with women, who face difficulties with respect to mobilization; the VDOs have thus made very little impact in this regard.

The projet economie familiale (PEEF) supported by a German agro-action VDO and another German project CILSS (PAC) is under way in the Djibo region in northern Burkina Faso. The project which aims to promote women through women's groups, consists in assisting the women in their activities of collective farming, market gardening, small-scale animal husbandry and handicrafts (making of baskets, carpets, blankets and other decorative items for the house). About a hundred women's groups are involved in these activities which is becoming a major attraction for all the women in the region.

The Association Vive la Paysanne (AVLP) is a peasant association founded between 1979-1980 by about a dozen youth from Sapone, a town located some 30 km from the capital city. The AVLP undertakes important and widely varied activities in the advancement of women including literacy and general education programmes, installation of mills, building of carts for transporting water, improved homes, cheap catering services, gathering of sweet almonds, excursions and visits to other groups.

These various activities are always carried out together with men, who most often are also interested in the advancement of the family. However, certain traditional obstacles still impede the effectiveness of the actions taken and erode the expected results.

2.3 Institutions of Burkina Faso and women

The condition of women in sub-Saharan Africa deteriorated markedly over the past 20 years. The United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) thus led African Governments to take a stand in favour of women. In Burkina Faso, the People's Democratic Revolution (RDP) has expressly indicated its firm political will to attain economic and social development with the full involvement of women. Back in October 1985, the Discour d'orientation politique (DOP) (Political Guidance Statement) spelt out the role of women in the RDP by stating that in changing the social order that oppressed women, the revolution had created conditions for their genuine emancipation, conditions which would enable them to assume their responsibility and engage their involvement in productive activities and in the various battles facing the people.

In the 1986-1990 five-year plan, improvement of the status of women figues as one of the seven basic components of the development strategy. The establishment of the Union des femmes du Burkina Faso (UFB), a political structure which mobilizes women at the village, district, provincial and national levels, was considered to a significant landmark. The remedial process embarked upon since 15 October has been targeted at carrying through this orientation and to give priority to development

actions and requirements initiated by women. In November 1985, the family bill was adopted and this has led to many injustices, inherited from traditional and feudal practices being remedied. Some of the new laws which have been passed include consecration of monogamy as a common right of marriages, freedom in the choice of a spouse, exercise of parental authority, right of inheritance of a surviving spouse, a minimum of 17 years for the marriage of girls, abolition of levirate, the practice of giving a widow in marriage to the brother of her dead husband, and sororate which consists in giving the younger sister of a dead woman to her widower.

At the moment, Burkina Faso is the Sahelian country with the most comprehensive Family Law. The major remaining problem, however, is the effective application of this legislation in the rural areas where customary and other practices, illiteracy, isolation and poverty constitute substantial obstacles to its application.

CONCLUSION

The study on popular participation in Burkina Faso points to a favourable socio-cultural climate. In fact, the historical experience of the largest ethnic group in the country, the Mossi, in the organization of traditional associations, based on democratic and egalitarian participation of members, is a major asset in implementation of popular participation in the country. Many VDOs have patterned their activities along the lines of such associations with a view to promoting original forms of development. The "Naam" groups which are found throughout the country are striking example of the economic achievements that can be made through such organization, for example, the promotion of small-scale domestic animal husbandry, drying and preservation of perishable foods, processing of raw materials into consumer goods, soap making, weaving and basket making, as well as social activities such as literacy programmes, training and information according to the needs of participants.

The example of the "Naam" groups, supported by the six "S" VDOs could serve as on basis for the formation of similar groups in other countries. Some neighbouring countries already have groups similar to the "Naam". One example of these is the **Samanis** in the Niger.

A detailed study of this type of association will, no doubt make it possible to design a co[illegible]pment-wide strategy for better integration of women, who are most often marginalized [illegible] the economic and decision-making processes.

The study has shown that considerable gains have been made with respect to the participation of the women of Burkina Faso in development. The image of women in the groups or associations in the country has been enhanced, and the system of external intervention is developing greater responsibility among the people concerned. In spite of the dynamism of some women's groups, a lot of effort still needs to be deployed in terms of literacy education for women, who have the lowest literacy rate, with enrolment in primary schools of 37 per cent, secondary schools 31.6 per cent and in higher education 23.9 per cent. This imbalance is even more accentuated in the rural areas. Intensive functional literacy campaigns are needed to ensure rational management of participatory development.

In Burkina Faso, the problem is not one of the integration of women in development, in the sense indicated by some authors, but rather a question of technology transfer, access to available funds, training of women and promotion of viable autonomous structures such as women's groups and co-operatives.

However, the major development problems of the country cannot be solved without taking into account the main socio-economic agents, namely women and the youth who are often relegated to the sidelines in decision-making in traditional societies.

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